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Signing of the U.S.-Kosovo Agreement on the Protection and Preservation of Certain Cultural Properties

Remarks

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Secretary of State

Kosovar President Atifete Jahjaga

Treaty Room

Washington, DC

December 14, 2011

SECRETARY CLINTON: Good afternoon, and it's such a great pleasure to welcome President Jahjaga here to the State Department. I have had the opportunity of meeting with her in the past, most recently in September during the United Nations General Assembly, and I am always pleased when we have an opportunity to consult and discuss matters of great importance to both of our countries.

To Chairman Warren Miller and other members of the United States Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad, as well as the ambassador from Kosovo to the United States, this is a really important agreement that we are signing today, because the United States has a special interest in helping to preserve cultural heritage sites in countries around the world, because the vast majority of Americans are immigrants and descendants of immigrants. So the work of this commission is of great importance to us.

First, I want to say a word about the president. As I have consistently, I conveyed on behalf of the United States the strong and continued support of our country for Kosovo's sovereignty and territorial integrity. President Obama and I are committed to ensuring that the future Kosovo is attempting to chart is of critical importance first and foremost for the people of Kosovo but also for the entire region. And I welcome the European Union's decision earlier this month that we hope helps pave the way for Kosovo's continued integration into the EU. This agreement we are about to sign commits our two governments to the protection and preservation, without



discrimination, of the cultural heritage sites of national, religious, and ethnic groups that were victims of genocide during World War II.

Now, we know from experience that measures like these work. This will be the United States' 24th such cultural preservation agreement, and in countries from Estonia to Italy, we have seen real results. Forty years ago, the United States was the first nation in the world to ratify the World Heritage Convention, and we are proud that we have continued that work over the years. And our commitment is to the preservation of all of Kosovo's cultural heritage: Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Serb, Albanian, you name it. We are committed to helping you preserve it.

I saw firsthand one of the most cherished cultural treasures, the Gračanica Monastery, a Serbian Orthodox site that dates back to the 14th century, but it's just one of many such sites. And it's essential that as Kosovo forges a pluralistic society, a nation that guarantees citizenship rights, equal rights to all of its people, that all of these sites be preserved for the people in Kosovo and the Balkans, as well as others throughout the world who share that same heritage.

So this is another step on the road to a thriving, independent, multiethnic Kosovo, where democratic institutions are strong and opportunities are abundant, and where I think the president has set exactly the right tone by painting a vision of what Kosovo can become.

Madam President.

PRESIDENT JAHJAGA: Honorable Secretary Clinton, thank you very much. The signing of the Agreement on the Protection and Preservation of Certain Cultural Properties is a powerful symbolic act, and part of the strong relationship and friendship between the Republic of Kosovo and the United States of America. The United States of America is Kosovo's strongest supporter and ally. Madam Secretary, you and the American people have always stood by us in our most difficult times, in achieving freedom, and now in our process of state building.

Today, Kosovo is a multiethnic and inclusive society, where all its ethnic communities live in freedom and peace. Our approach is one of building good neighborhood relations with all the countries in the region, and Kosovo has established itself as a factor of stability in the Balkans.

Kosovo is a new country with a long history. We have a rich cultural heritage that has survived over the centuries. This past, expressed in the architectural values, in the objects of worship and religious monuments, testifies that we lived together for the centuries and represent each other's heritage as common values.

This agreement between the Republic of Kosovo and the United States of America is another testament of our commitment to cultural tolerance and multiculturalism, and our embrace for the diversity of the members of our society regardless of ethnicity, faith, or race. The American values and ideals are an inspiration to us, and we look forward to jointly implement this agreement to further preserve our common cultural heritage. Thank you very much.

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you so much, Madam President.

PRESIDENT JAHJAGA: Thank you.

MODERATOR: The Secretary of State and the president of the Republic of Kosovo are signing an agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Republic of Kosovo on the Protection and Preservation of Certain Cultural Properties.

(The agreement was signed.)

(Applause.)

SECRETARY CLINTON: Thank you all very much.

QUESTION: Madam President, one question, please?

QUESTION: One question?

PRESIDENT JAHJAGA: Yes?

QUESTION: Madam President, (inaudible) humanitarian convoy that (inaudible) Kosovo (inaudible)?

PRESIDENT JAHJAGA: There are the rules and there are norms that are (inaudible) the international convention (inaudible) legislation in the Congress on the issue about (inaudible) and humanitarian aid. And we are going to respect all international convention, constitution of Kosovo, and the administration of Kosovo in that process.

QUESTION: Thank you. Can you add anything to that?

SECRETARY CLINTON: Well, I fully support what the president just said. In addition, we have checked with the United Nations and others. They do not report any humanitarian crisis or need. We would urge that the people of Kosovo, particularly in the north, work together. They are entitled under the constitution of Kosovo to equal rights and full citizenship. The sooner that we have the integration of all citizens of Kosovo into the unity of the state, the more possible will be the kind of future that the president is seeking for the people (inaudible).

Thank you.

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